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ABSTRACT

The progress of junior college students at Northern Illinois University is considered, a brief review of the junior college movement in Illinois is presented, and admission changes related to transfer students are identified. In 1965 a network of community colleges in Illinois was established with a curriculum designed to provide students with university-parallel instruction. Findings show, however, that students transferring from these programs to senior institutions have lower grade point averages than those students who attended a four-year school as freshmen ("natives"). A second study was conducted comparing native and transfer elementary and elementary/special education graduates. Among findings of this study was that ACT composite scores were significantly lower for transfer junior college students than for either natives or students transferring from four-year institutions. It was concluded that the difference seems to disappear the longer junior college transfer students remain at the senior institution, and that students with motivation have an excellent chance of success. (PHR)

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HOW ARE JUNIOR COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS DOING AT SENIOR INSTITUTIONS?

The purpose of this article is to relate recent analyses of the progress of Junior college students at one State senior institution, Northern Illinois University (NIU). The researchers were concerned about these students because NIU receives more transfer students than any other senior institution in Illinois. It has been estimated that by 1980 as many as 60 percent of NIU upper division enrollment will be transfer students. The text that follows considers (1) a brief resume of the junior college movement in Illinois, (2) the changes in admissions policies and procedures at NIU as it relates to transfer students, and (3) a review of selected recent studies concerning the progress of transfer students at NIU.

*JUNIOR COLLEGE MOVEMENT IN ILLINOIS*

The notion of a two-year college was first proposed in the late nineteenth century by William Rainey Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago. Though his intention was elitist (to draw away the masses of mediocre students so as to enable the university to concentrate on the specialized studies of the upper two years and beyond), he unwittingly planted the seeds of the American Junior college movement. Decatur Baptist College in Texas (1897) and Joliet Junior College in Illinois (1902) became the earliest two-year colleges in America (6:48). The past 75 years have witnessed the continued spread of these institutions.

In 1965 the Illinois Public Community College Act established a network of community colleges in Illinois. By the provisions of this Act, these institutions were to provide a variety of courses and programs for persons interested in pursuing some form of postsecondary education. Among the program options to

be offered was a baccalaureate-oriented curriculum. The purpose of this curriculum was to provide university-parallel instruction for qualified students to facilitate their transfer into baccalaureate programs at senior institutions (2:SS 1-2). Students allowed entry to these baccalaureate-transfer programs were to have equivalent ability and competence as possessed by students admitted to state universities for similar programs (1:1481).

This last provision seems to imply a screening of applicants to these transfer programs, and yet many colleges report that their programs have no criteria for admission--that no attempt at screening is being made (2:11). Findings show that students transferring from these programs to senior institutions have, as a group, lower upper division grade point averages than "native" students (those attending the senior institution for all four years of their baccalaureate work) and that fewer of them tend to be in good academic standing (2:SS 1-2).

While baccalaureate institutions generally agree with the concept of offering educational opportunities beyond high school to the mass population, they have the equally important objective of promoting a high degree of academic excellence in their students. They question how well the typical junior college transfer student is able to achieve in a baccalaureate program as compared to those students who have gone through both lower and upper division work at the senior institution.

*ADMISSION TO NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY*

In 1968 Dale Patterson conducted a study at Northern Illinois University to compare students who had transferred to Northern with students who had entered NIU directly after high school graduation. His findings showed that "native"

students tended to have ranked higher in their high school graduating class and achieved higher ACT scores. Although junior college students had ranked lower, those individuals who had been granted associate degrees had been able to perform well at Northern. He recommended that Northern give consideration to certifying students who have received an associate degree as having completed the general education requirements without regard to course-by-course equivalence (5:79-88).

In 1972 NIU altered its admission policies to allow community college graduates to transfer into upper division programs without loss of credits or class standing. The new provisions stipulated that these students have an associate degree in a baccalaureate program, a "C" average (2.00 on a 4.00 basis) as calculated by the community college and at least sixty semester hours of credit (4:9-10).

Soon after this new policy went into effect Robert Lewis conducted a study to determine its effect on the mean grade point averages of upper division students at NIU. His study included 1575 full-time classified junior-level students. Among the data collected for each student were their grade point averages for the first and second semester of the junior year and the first semester of the senior year, sex, major college, ACT composite score, high school percentile rank and age.

The study found the following:

1. The retention rate for native students was significantly higher than the retention rate for transfer students.
2. Grade point averages were consistently higher for native students than for transfer students from Illinois public community colleges (with or

without the associate degrees) or other transfer students.

3. Grade point averages were consistently higher for other transfer students than for Illinois public community college transfer students without the associate degree and with sixty or more semester hours of transfer credit.
4. Grade point averages were significantly higher for female than for male students.
5. Significant differences in mean grade point averages were found between colleges at NIU.
6. No significant differences between grade point averages were found when the data were analyzed by ACT composite score, high school percentile rank, or age (3:75-83).

The scope of the Lewis study included students from the four colleges at the university. Because his study was broadly based this writer engaged in a more specific study within the College of Education at NIU. The current study completed in January, 1977 was an analysis and comparison of native versus transfer Elementary and Elementary-Special Education Dual major graduates for the years 1972, 1973, and 1974. For each of the years under investigation, the Elementary Education and Elementary-Special Education Graduates were classified into six groups. The six groups were:

Elementary Education Graduates:

(1) Natives
(2) Transfers from Four-Year Schools
(3) Transfers from Junior Colleges

Elementary Education-Special Education Dual Major Graduates:

(4) Natives
(5) Transfers from Four-Year Schools
(6) Transfers from Junior Colleges

A 20 percent systematic sampling of each of the six groups was selected. This was done by taking every fifth student from an alphabetical list. These samples were then analyzed and compared on composite ACT scores, grade point average for the first semester, professional grade point average and final grade point average. The study found the following:

1. For the three years studied the ACT Composite Scores were highest for the natives and four year students. Transfer junior college students were significantly lower. In addition, the data revealed a trend on the part of the junior college transfers to be entering Northern with lower ACT composites each ensuing year.
2. The difference in ACT Composite Scores was not related to the department--either elementary or special education--selected by the student nor the year in which they completed their degree.
3. The native students appeared to achieve better than the junior college transfers in their first professional semester. This initial difference did not continue through graduation. It should be noted that the transfers appear to achieve better the longer they are involved in Northern's program whereas the other types of students remained more constant.
4. While the professional grade point average of the students increased from 1972 to 1974, the extent of the increase appears to be small enough to be of questionable value.
5. The professional grade point average increased in 1973 and 1974 from the 1972 group. The role of grade inflation at institutions of higher education may be a factor, however, cause and effect is not possible

to determine.

6. The final grade point average, unlike the professional grade point average, differed with the native students receiving the lowest grade point average and the transfers ending with a higher grade point average. While this appears an interesting finding, it is difficult to arrive at meaningful conclusions, since the native grade point average includes all the work done at Northern while the transfers more likely consisted of a majority of professional courses with minimum numbers of courses from other areas (7:1-22).

*CONCLUSIONS - OBSERVATIONS*

It is the writer's observation that changes in admission standards for junior college transfers has not resulted in an appreciable drop in the quality of graduates from NIU. Although transfer students intially have more difficulty than native students, this difference seems to disappear the longer they remain at the senior institution. Students with the motivation to continue in pursuit of a bachelor's degree have an excellent chance of receiving a quality education and successfully completing their program. This fact should encourage and support students who elect to attend local junior colleges and later transfer to senior institutions in Illinois. Moreover, educational leaders are challenged to continue to facilitate and improve articulation processes among these institutions.

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